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Linda McCulloch
Superintendent

DATE: February 20, 2003

TO: School Food Authority Administrators and Food Service Managers

FROM: Christine Emerson, Director
               School Nutrition Programs

SUBJECT: School Policy for Meal Money

The policy regarding children without money for meals or children who owe for meals is a matter of school discretion.   This includes decisions about whether or not to extend credit to children who forget their meal money or whether or not to provide an alternate meal to such children. A written policy should be adopted by the school district explaining how the School Food Authority (SFA) will handle this situation.

According to 7 CFR part 210, only reimbursable free, reduced-price and paid meals served to eligible children may be claimed for reimbursement. Therefore, meals in which a child owes for meals may not be claimed as free or reduced-priced meals if the child is not eligible for free or reduced-priced meals. If an alternate meal is served, the meal may not be claimed for reimbursement if it does not contain the required food items/components.

While the SFA is not obligated to provide meals to children who have not paid, the USDA encourages schools to be flexible in this area, particularly with young children and children with disabilities who may be unable to take full responsibility for their money. The SFA is encouraged to provide some credit (i.e., up to $5) for these children or serve an alternate meal. In some cases, the PTA or other school or community organizations may establish a fund to pay for children without meal money.

At a minimum, schools should ensure that parents are fully aware of the written policy adopted by the school for children who do not have meal money. Whatever the policy, it must be applied consistently to avoid discrimination.

Please contact Diane Dolan, School Nutrition Specialist, (406) 444-4416 if you have any questions.